Ancient Egypt:
‘The Second Intermediate Period’:
The War between the Theban Egyptians and the ‘Hyksos’ (the Amu or ‘Proto-Israelites’):
Reminiscences from the 13th century B.C.:
The Tale of Apophis and Seqenenre,
with a New Interpretation of the Significance of
the Strange Demand placed by the Hyksos Emperor
upon his Egyptian Vassal,
and a Response to Orly Goldwasser’s Odd Exaltation

of the ‘Sethian Proto-Monotheism’ Cultivated in the City of Avaris

This e-book is part of *a series of publications* dealing with the numerous primary and secondary sources speaking of or referring to “the War between the Theban Egyptians and the ‘Hyksos’” (as I have chosen to style it), or between the native Egyptians and (a section of) the “Proto-Israelites” – a series of long and terrible armed conflicts which took place in the 1500s B.C., and which culminated in the Departure or “Exodus” (possibly in the wake of an armistice, or some other type of agreement) of the “Hyksos” from the eastern Nile Delta (the “Goshen” of the *Book of Exodus*), and in the concomitant Liberation of All Egypt from the yoke of “Hyksos” domination and overlordship.

Pharaoh Ahmose (Iah-Mesu or Yah-Mesu in Egyptian, “Yah is Born”; Ahmose and Amasis are conventional English transliterations) the First was the Egyptian leader who completed the victory over the Amu, chasing them all the way into “Palestine” or “Canaan” (Retjenu/Phoenicia), which was where their ancestors had come from, and which was also part of the “Hyksos” sphere of influence, thereby becoming the first emperor of the glorious 18th dynasty (which was really the continuation in a new form of the 17th royal dynasty of Thebes, which had been characterized by the involuntary vassalage or subjugation of a number of its rulers to the “Hyksos” or Amu monarchs of the Delta) and ushering in a great Egyptian National Revival.

For other papers belonging to the above mentioned series, please see the e-book section on my profile at https://vid.academia.edu/EdmundSchilvold, as well as the Bibliography at the end of this document.

Front page illustration: Hippopotamus in pond. Source:

https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/
Was there a pool similar to this one in the City of Thebes?

Regarding the three terms employed in this document – “Hyksos”, “Asiatics” and “Amu” – the latter of the three is the word that is nowadays usually translated into English as “Asiatics” (because these “Asiatics” had come into Egypt from the Levant, and the area now styled the Levant, or Palestine, was viewed by the ancients as being part of “Asia”), but which Sir Alan Gardiner, the great Egyptologist, and the capable translator of the *First Kamose Stela* into English (1916), chose to leave un-translated – *perhaps* because leaving it intact reveals the rather likely connection between this ancient Egyptian term for the ethnic category which produced the “Hyksos Pharaohs” and the “Hebrew” term “Am”, which, in the Tanakh (roughly equivalent to the “Old Testament”), is often – albeit not *always* – used to designate the “Israelites”.

This document was first published online by Edmund Schilvold in March 2025. Copyright for this e-book, including the digitized translation, with commentary, and a new interpretation, and a response to Orly Goldwasser’s baffling defense of the priority given to the Cult of Seth by the “Hyksos” of Avaris, is asserted by the undersigned, Edmund Schilvold.

The footnotes accompanying the translation have been put within ((double parentheses)), for the sake of legibility.

Significant additions to the text of the original translation (my own commentary) have been put within {curly brackets}, and have sometimes also been marked with the initials of the undersigned, i.e. with “E.S.”, for the sake of clarity.

The (ordinary parentheses) and the [square brackets] found within the quoted translation are those of the translator and the editor.

Again, the reader should note that this document is part of a new series of concise e-books of mine dealing with the ancient Egyptian stela and papyri and monuments pertaining to or having some bearing on the so-called *Enigma of the Hyksos*, which, in my humble view, is not much of an enigma anymore. It is, after all, some *160 years* since Willem Pleyte (1836–1903), a pioneering Dutch Egyptologist, published his ground-breaking work on the Hyksos and the Cult of Seth, *La religion des pré-Israélites* [the Religion of the Proto-Israelites]: *recherches sur le dieu Seth* [Research on the Deity of Seth] – a work which was in fact held in high esteem by a number of prominent scholars (such as Dr. Paul Carus) in the late 1800s, but which was never, interestingly, fully translated into English – and more than *half a century* since the Austrian Archaeological Institute began its systematic excavations of Tell el-Dab'a, the site of the ancient city of Avaris.

As far as I am able to ascertain, we presently know more than enough to be able to conclude that ancient historians like Titus Flavius Josephus, Manetho, Apion and Ptolomy of Mendes were right when they identified the "Israelites", or some of their ancestors, with the Hyksos expelled from the Egyptian Delta during the reign of Pharaoh Ahmose I.

The War of the Theban Egyptians with the Hyksos: The Legend of Apophis (the Amu or “Hyksos” ruler of Avaris) and Seqenenre (his Vassal, the King of Thebes, who led the first uprising against him)

Introduction by James Pritchard (quote)

Another document on the Hyksos rule might perhaps be among folk tales treated of above. It is a legend of later date, carrying the story of a contest between two rulers in Egypt. The Hyksos King Apophis in the Delta {Lower Egypt} held suzerainty over the Egyptian King Seqnen-Re {a name now usually transliterated as Seqenenre or Seqenenra; “the one whom Ra has made brave”} at Thebes {in Upper Egypt}. Apophis laid before Seqnen-Re one of those difficult problems which oriental literature loves, an insulting demand which threatened the dignity of the Egyptian ruler.

We lack the end of the story, but the logic of the situation suggests that Seqnen-Re must have extricated himself from the indignity by returning

to Apophis a proposition which counterchecked the problem set by the Hyksos king.

Papyrus Sallier I (British Museum 10185), recto i I–iii 3; verso ii–iii, was written in the late Nineteenth Dynasty (end of the 13th century B.C.) in the colloquial language. ((7))

It is facsimiled in *Select Papyri in the Hieratic Character from the Collections of the British Museum*, I (London, 1841), Pls. I–IH, and in *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*. Second Series (ed. by E. A. W. Budge, London, 1923), Pls. LIII–LV.

A transcription into hieroglyphic is given in A. H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (*Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca*, 1, Brussels, 1932), 85–89. Translations by B. Gunn and A. H. Gardiner, in *JEA*, v (1918), 40–45, and by Erman, *LAE*, 165–67.

{Commencement of the legend or tale itself (quote)}

NOW IT SO HAPPENED THAT the land of Egypt was in distress. There was no Lord – life, prosperity, health! – or king at the time {meaning that there was no native Egyptian pharaoh controlling both Upper and Lower Egypt, as there had been before the euphemistically styled Second Intermediate Period}.

However, it happened that, as for King Seqnen-Re {or Seqenenre/Seqenenra (Tao), father of Kamose and Ahmose}: – life, prosperity, health! – he was Ruler – life, prosperity, health! – of the Southern City {Thebes, in Upper or Southern Egypt, the last stronghold of the native Egyptians}. ((8))

Distress was in the town of the Asiatics {the Amu/A’amu in Egyptian}, for Prince Apophis {or Apep, or Apepi, or Apopi} – life, prosperity, health –

was in Avaris, and the entire land was subject to him with their dues, the north as well, with all the good produce of the Delta.

{It is unclear why there was distress in Avaris, which was, after all, the capital of the Hyksos themselves – was it due to the ruler, Apophis? Was his reign particularly tyrannical, perhaps? If so, it would help explain why the native Egyptian or Theban uprising against the Hyksos overlordship appears to have begun when Apophis had inherited the throne of Avaris, with Seqenenre, King of Thebes.}

THEN King Apophis – life, prosperity, health! – made {for?} him{self?} Seth as lord {sic}, and he would not serve any god who was in the land [except] Seth. ((9))

{It is exceedingly curious that every single mention of Apophis or Apepi, whose rule and overlordship had been so hated and despised by many of the native Egyptians, is followed by the "Life – Prosperity – Health!" exclamation, which the Theban Egyptians would never have applied to a Hyksos or Amu/A'amu ruler (c.f. the vastly different language of the two stelae commissioned by Kamose, King of Thebes, for example). This would seem to suggest that the author of this tale was either sympathetic to the Hyksos or Amu/A'amu, or that he was living at a time which was so far removed (several centuries) from the actual historical events inspiring the tale that he did not really understand what he was talking about at all. – E.S.}

{As for the statement that Apophis would not serve any god but Seth, this claim has been partially corroborated by various archaeological discoveries of the 20th century, such as the following inscriptions:

"Horus: pacifier-of-the-Two-Lands, the Perfect God, 'Akenen-re {or Aa-qen-en-Ra; a variant of Apophis' throne name}, may he live. **(This is) what he made as his monument for his father, [Seth] lord of**

Avaris,
when he placed all lands under his feet.”

Inscription on offering table found in the ruins of Avaris (Redford, 1997, p. 7, emphasis added)

“Horus: pacifier-[of-the-Two-Lands …], Son of Re, **Apopi**, given life.
[He made it as his monument for his father Seth (?), making] for him
many flag-staves and a fixture (?) of bronze for this god.”

Inscription on a piece of a building (Redford, 1997, p. 7, emphasis added)

E.S.}

And [he] built a temple of good and eternal work beside the House of [King Apo]phis – life, prosperity, health! – [and] he appeared [every] day to have sacrifices made … daily to Seth.

{Here we have a statement which has actually been partially corroborated by modern archaeology – there was indeed, from around 1700 B.C., a comparatively large temple (!) in Avaris:

> “This major temple (…) is one of the largest sanctuaries known from the Middle Bronze Age world, being about 30 m long. It was painted blue (…).” (Bietak, 1996, p. 36)

In front of this monumental building was an altar, in the vicinity of which

cattle had been sacrificed as burnt offerings (Bietak, 1996, p. 36) – a type of ritual which would have been anathema to the Egyptians – and near pits containing “calcinated cattle bones” (ibid, p. 36), also in front of the temple, the archaeologists uncovered the remains of pairs of sacrificed donkeys. Moreover, in a nearby cemetery, in front of the tomb of a deputy treasurer, “not just two but at least five and probably six donkeys had been buried”. (Bietak, 1996, p. 41)

Now, considering the well-known fact that the donkey was one of the animals viewed as representing Seth, the presence of these extraordinary donkey sacrifices could certainly be viewed as supporting the claim that the Avaris of the Hyksos was a center of the Cult of Seth, or of deities comparable to Seth, that the “Shepherd King” Apophis preferred to honor Seth alone, and that the Hyksos or A’amu “ruled without the Sun”, to cite the words of Queen Hatshepsut (c.f. her inscription at Speos Artemidos). The archaeological evidence is still somewhat inconclusive, however, and Bietak proposes a different interpretation of the donkey offerings – one having to do with trading and with treaties (ibid, p. 36, p. 41).}

And the officials [of the King] – life, prosperity, health! – carried wreaths, just exactly as is done (in) the temple of the Re-Har-akhti.

{I have recently begun to suspect that King Apophis is the actual, historical person hidden behind the partly fictional façade of “King Solomon” – their reigns are of approximately *equal length*, *both* have extensive interactions with Phoenicia (c.f. the Second Kamose Stela), and *both* are associated with a great temple – but I will not go further into that hypothesis here. – E.S.}

Now then, as for (5) [King] A[pophis] – life, prosperity, health! – he wanted to [send] an irritating message (to) King Seqnen-Re – [life, prosperity, health! – the] Prince of the Southern City.

Now [AFTER] MANY DAYS FOLLOWING THIS, then King [Apophis—life, prosperity, health!] – had summoned. …

(Here the papyrus is badly broken. Apophis appears to be in consultation with his “scribes and wise men,” and they seem to suggest the arrogant demand about the hippopotamus pool at Thebes. If Seqnen-Re should accede to this demand he would lose face, but he was in no position to ignore it. His only recourse would be to devise a logical but equally absurd riposte.)

[“So we shall see the power of the god who] (ii I) is with him as protector. He relies upon no god who is in the [entire land] except Amon-Re, King of the Gods.” ((10))

{This seems like a strange statement, coming as it does from Apophis, or from his court. If taken at face value, it would mean that the Hyksos acknowledged Amon-Re or Amen-Ra or Amun-Ra as the higher deity, in spite of their devotion to Seth. The statement could also be seen as ironic, however, and as mocking Seqenenre and his religion. – E.S.}

Now AFTER MANY DAYS FOLLOWING THIS, then King Apophis – life, prosperity, health! – sent to the Prince of the Southern City (with) the message which his scribes and wise men had told him. Now when the messenger of King Apophis –life, prosperity, health! – reached the Prince of the Southern City, THEN HE WAS taken into the presence of the Prince of the Southern City. {There is a great deal of repetition in this story, a literary device often seen as typical of fairytales.}

THEN THEY said to the messenger of King Apophis –life, prosperity, health!: “Why were you sent to the Southern City? How did you come to (make) this trip?”

THEN the messenger (5) said to him: “King Apophis – life, prosperity, health! – sends to you as follows: ‘Have the hippopotamus pool which is in the orient of the City done [away] with! For they do not let sleep come to me by day or by night,’ and the noise is (in) the ears of his city.”

THEN the Prince of the Southern City was dumfounded for a long time, for it happened that he did not know how to return [answer] to the messenger of King Apophis – life, prosperity, health!

{Dare we say dumfounded by the “wisdom” of “King Solomon”? – E.S.}

{The fact that the hippopotamus was another of the animals associated with Seth, the deity Apophis had chosen to devote himself to, may be of some relevance here. Could it be that this association of the hippopotamus with Seth made returning an answer all the more difficult?}

THEN the Prince of the Southern City said to him: “Well, your lord – life, prosperity, health! – should hear something about [this pool which is in] the orient of the Southern City here.”

THEN [the messenger said: “The] matter about which he sent me [must be carried out].”

[Then the Prince of the Southern City had] the [messenger of King Apophis – life, prosperity, health!] – taken care of, [with] good [things]: meat, cakes, …

[Then the Prince of the Southern City said to him: “Tell] your [lord]: As for everything which you say to him, ((11)) I will do it. Tell [him] so.” …

[Then the messenger of King] Apophis – life, prosperity, health! – started out to travel to the place where (iii I) his lord – life, prosperity, health! – was.
THEN the Prince of the Southern City had his chief officials summoned, as well as every superior soldier that he had, and he repeated to them every message about which King Apophis – life, prosperity, health! – had sent to him.

THEN they were one and all silent for a long time, (for) they did not know how to answer him, whether good or bad.

{As the reader will already have observed, it is far from clear why this demand regarding the removal of the hippopotamuses was so difficult to accede to or respond to. My hypothesis is that the destruction of the pool would have involved the killing of the animals in it, and that this could not be done without offending Seth – and Apophis. One the one hand, Seqenenre, as a prince subordinate to Apophis, was obliged to carry out the orders of his superior. On the other hand, however, Seqenenre could not do so without killing, or at least disturbing, animals associated with Seth, the preferred god of Apophis, his unwanted lord and master.

Compare the various aspects of this tale of Apophis and Seqenenre to what Plutarch says of Seth or Typhon in his *Isis and Osiris* treatise:

> 32 (…) At Saïs in the vestibule of the temple of Athena was carved a babe and an aged man, and after this a hawk, and next a fish, and finally an hippopotamus. The symbolic meaning of this was: “O ye that are coming into the world and departing from it, God hateth shamelessness.”

> The babe is the symbol of coming into the world and the aged man the symbol of departing from it, and by a hawk they indicate God, by the fish hatred, as has already been said, because of the sea, and by the hippopotamus shamelessness; for it is said that he kills his sire and forces his mother to mate with him. (…)
>
> 50 For this reason they assign to him [Seth] the most stupid of the domesticated animals, the ass, and of the wild animals, the most savage, the crocodile and the hippopotamus.
>
> In regard to the ass we have already offered some explanation. At Hermopolis [Hermopolis Magna, Egyptian name Khmunu (“City of the Eight”); an ancient city in Upper Egypt, and a center of the Cult of Thoth or Hermes] they point out a statue of Typhon [or Seth] in the form of an hippopotamus, on whose back is poised a hawk fighting with a serpent. By the hippopotamus they mean to indicate Typhon, and by the hawk a power and rule, which Typhon strives to win by force, oftentimes without success, being confused by his wickedness and creating confusion. (…)
>
> (Plutarch, Isis and Osiris, 32, 50)

E.S.}

THEN King Apophis – life, prosperity, health! – sent to …” ((12))

{End of preserved part of the Legend or Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre}

Footnotes for the above text

((7)) For example, the 2nd person singular is translated “you,” rather than “thou.”

((8)) Thebes.

((9)) The Egyptian god Seth served also as their equivalent for various Asiatic gods. Cf. pp. 201, 249, 252, 257.

((10)) This is taken to be the end of the advice of Apophis’ wise men. It pits their god Seth against the Theban god Amon-Re.

((11)) Sic, but it seems probable that it should be read “me.”

((12)) The story breaks off in the middle of a sentence.

(Pritchard, 1969, pp. 231–232)

Addendum – the territorial extent of the Hyksos or Proto-Israelite Empire (exceedingly similar to the territory allegedly given to the descendants of Abram/Abraham by YHWH in Genesis 15:17–21)

“A fascinating explanation has been given for the beginning of the empire – admittedly without any supporting element – by B.J. Kemp (1978: 45): It is more than likely – he says – that **the Hyksos sovereignty covered not only the Nile Delta, but southern Palestine as well**, and that for

this reason Ahmose, in conquering Sharuhen, also inherited ‘an existing vassal system which required only a limited display of military determination to take over’. Nonetheless, archaeological excavations throughout the southern Levant have revealed destruction layers dated to the mid-16th century (Weinstein 1981:2). **Numerous and distant places such as Ashkelon, Jericho and Bethel were torched and torn down, and the destructions of those areas have been related to Egyptian campaigns** (Morris 2005: 29, Knapp 1992: 89) as well as to internal Canaanite conflicts (Bunimovitz 1993: 444).”

(De Magistris, 2014, pp. 19–20)

A Response to Goldwasser’s Strange Defense of “Sethian” Monotheism

While searching for more information on Apophis and the above “quarrel” between him and Seqenenre, I came across a short article **by Orly Goldwasser (2006)**, and almost immediately noticed that she had made the very the same observation I had made when reading the above tale, **namely that Apophis’ alleged devotion to Seth reminds one of the concept of monotheism**. But whereas it would never even have occurred to *me* – knowing what I know of Seth; of the dark qualities associated with him, of how this deity became associated with the alien Hyksos supremacy over Lower Egypt, and knowing also more than a little of the exceedingly lofty nature of the native Egyptian religion of the second millennium B.C., which was a kind of *henotheism* (a tolerant and philosophically rational “monotheism”), in which a Spiritual Sun played the role of Supreme Deity – to attempt to construe Apophis’ apparently somewhat “exclusivistic” worship of *Seth alone* as a positive phenomenon, while, at the same time, depreciating the more complex and nuanced religious life of the native Egyptians, *that* would seem to be

exactly what *Goldwasser* does in her “King Apophis of Avaris and the Emergence of Monotheism” essay.

She realizes, *of course*, like me, that it is highly probable that there is a link between the Hyksos and the “Proto-Israelites” – even though she does not say so explicitly – and it seems to me that this leads her, like certain other scholars (such as Gerard Gertoux), to go to the most absurd lengths in an attempt to portray the Hyksos or Amu or Asiatics in a neutral or positive light, while treating the native Egyptians in the opposite way.

To realize how skewed her perspective is, one only needs to consider how a native Egyptian with knowledge of these affairs would probably have spoken.

In other words, it may well be that the seed of “Israelite” or “Mosaic” or “Biblical” or “Torah” monotheism (if “monotheism” be the right word for it), and of the fanatical refusal to acknowledge any gods beside and above YHWH, is to be found in Avaris (no pun intended), but if that be the case, then any impartial observer would have to conclude that this seed is very far from being of a positive kind, since it is Seth, who is neither a good deity, nor the Supreme Deity, that this early “monotheism” revolves around – the same Seth who, in the minds of the native Egyptians (by the 1500s B.C.), had come to symbolize the hated occupation of their country by the Hyksos.

These are the historical actualities, and scholars like Orly Goldwasser need to start acknowledging them, as they are, instead of attempting to foist outlandish interpretations of them onto their readers – interpretations which are clearly motivated by ethnic or religious or political concerns – by perpetuating the same misrepresentation of the past, and of the High Civilization of Egypt, which is found in the Book of Exodus, for example, and which for more than two thousand years has

been portraying the ancient Egyptians in what every honest and disinterested scholar of these topics knows, or ought to know, is *a terribly biased and unjust manner*.

– E.S.

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Other resources:

On the several names of the pharaohs and other rulers of Egypt, and the meanings of these names:
https://pharaoh.se/ancient-egypt/period/second-intermediate-period/

Lists of the kings of the various Egyptian and non-Egyptian dynasties, along with the various estimates of when and for how long they reigned:
http://www.phouka.com/pharaoh/pharaoh/kingdoms/062int.html

The website for the ongoing excavations at Tell el Dab'a or Avaris:
https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/oeai/institute/branches/cairo/excavations-projects/tell-el-dab%CA%BFa

"Colours of Ancient Egypt – Red":
https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/researchers-in-museums/2018/12/04/colours-of-ancient-egypt-red/

On the Kamose "Victory Stela":
https://digitalkarnak.ucsc.edu/victory-stela-of-kamose/

Various photographs:
www.apxphotography.com

Various rare and difficult-to-obtain books:
www.meretsegerbooks.com

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